

REVELATION

Study 12: The Time is Near

In our previous study, we looked at John's vision of a new creation – heaven and earth finally being reunited in the way that God intended from the very beginning. We discussed how John's vision paints a picture of where history is heading, and how it is meant to encourage the churches that their current struggle is not even worth comparing to what God has in store for them. There is a Day coming when all followers of Jesus will reign with God over a new creation, and the entire earth will finally be filled with God's order, goodness, love and justice forever.

We have now reached the end of our study and the end of the Book of Revelation. As we said at the very beginning of this study, the Book of Revelation can be intimidating and complicated, but hopefully our study has brought us a fresh perspective and helped us realize that it's not just some strange book with weird images and secret language that predicts a future sequence of events.

The Book of Revelation was not written to predict the future or to describe how the world is going to end. It was written as a pastoral letter to first-century Christians who were being persecuted by the Roman Empire. It was written to people who were fearing for their lives, resisting 'the way of the empire', watching the execution of their brothers and sisters, and wondering if it was all worth it.

It is to these people that the Book of Revelation first speaks. And even though it continues to speak to all Christians all over the world and throughout history, the primary message and meaning of the book must be understood in light of the historical context of John's original audience. John wrote this prophetic apocalypse to communicate a clear message to seven specific churches living in the Roman province of Asia towards the end of the first-century. And that message is this:

"It is worth it. You must overcome. You have to patiently endure this time of tribulation and conquer the forces of evil that conspire against you because we know how this story is going to end. You must not compromise, get complacent or be complicit with the corrupt systems of the empire. Instead, you must conquer. You must follow the way of the Lamb (to the point of death if necessary) if you want to inherit the Promised Land of a new creation."

John began the Book of Revelation with an opening prologue and a greeting to the churches that he was writing to. Now in this final section, John wraps things up with a closing epilogue and some parting exhortations for all who hear the words that he has written. And so, in this final study, we are going to briefly read and discuss what John sees and hears now as he wraps up the book. There is an urgency in his voice and a warning for those who don't take this book seriously.

The Epilogue

Revelation 22:6-21

John's epilogue repeats some of the major themes that were first introduced in his prologue to the book. Here he reaffirms how he has received this revelation, and that everything that he has written is trustworthy and true. Once again, there is a pronouncement of blessing for those who keep what is written in the book, and there are multiple warnings that Jesus is going to return suddenly and at a moment that we might not expect. John makes it clear to his readers that what he has written is not simply his own message to the churches. It is a revelation that God has given him in order to show the churches the things that *must soon take place*.

Now, just like he did in the book's prologue, here in the book's epilogue John is once again using specific language to connect his book with the Book of Daniel ("*what must soon take place*"). As we discussed in our study of chapter one, in the Book of Daniel, God revealed to Daniel that there was a time coming in the future (in the '*latter days*') when the God of Israel would become the King over all the nations, and all nations would then need to give their loyalty to him.

In the Book of Revelation, John is declaring that this is the very thing that is happening now. The things that were future to Daniel are the things that are taking place in John's lifetime. Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah, the *latter day* kingdom of God has finally come to conquer the whole world. Even the mighty beast of Rome will be defeated and destroyed.

This reality that the time has finally come and that the long-anticipated kingdom of God has finally arrived is emphasized even further here when John is instructed "*to not seal up the words of this book*" because "*the time is near*". Just listen and compare the instructions given to John here at the end of the Book of Revelation with the instructions that were given to Daniel at the end of the Book of Daniel:

In the Book of Daniel, the angel tells Daniel, "Shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end... Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end."¹

But here in the Book of Revelation, the angel tells John, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near."²

In essence, the Book of Revelation is echoing the same message that Jesus went around teaching and proclaiming, "The time has come and the kingdom of God has arrived; repent and believe the good news!" This is why there is an urgency in John's voice. He has been given a message about the church's role in this conflict between the kingdom of God and the empires of this world. It is a direct word from God for the people of God, and therefore there is an expectation that those who read and hear this message will experience God's blessing if they will respond in obedience.

John wants his readers to know that there is still time to repent, but one day King Jesus will return as the executor of God's final act of justice. He will reward those who have remained faithful to him with resurrection and eternal life in a new creation where all threats will have been eliminated and nothing corrupt will ever be able to enter in. But he will also hold everyone who has rejected him and refused to repent accountable for corrupting his world with injustice, immorality and idolatry.

As we have mentioned throughout our study of this book, this revelation for the churches is meant to be both an encouragement and a warning. The Book of Revelation has repeatedly warned the churches in a variety of ways about complacency and compromise, but it has also persistently encouraged the churches with an inspiring message of hope. They must patiently endure this time of tribulation and stay faithful to the way of the Lamb because this is how the empires of this world will in fact become the kingdom of our God and his Messiah.

John has ended his book with words of assurance, warning and hope, but he has also ended his book with an invitation and a promise. There is an open invitation for all people to come out of the way of empire and to come be a part of this kingdom community. Those who come are promised the blessings of life in the new creation. Those who don't will suffer the same fate as the beast and Babylon. May we conquer with the Lamb; and may the kingdom come and God's will be done here on earth as it is in heaven. Amen. Come Lord Jesus!

¹ See Daniel 12:4, 9

² See Revelation 22:10